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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OREP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [BEXP](#) [ENRG](#) [ETRD](#) [KNNP](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#)
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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Scen setter for CODEL Faleomavaega's June Visit

Welcome to Uzbekistan

1. (SBU) Embassy Tashkent warmly welcomes your trip, which marks the first visit by a Congressional delegation to Uzbekistan in four years. Uzbekistan is the most populous country in Central Asia, its 28 million (overwhelmingly Muslim) people nearly as many as the other four former Soviet republics combined. U.S. relations with Uzbekistan have improved since reaching their nadir in the spring of 2007. We are working on establishing a political dialogue with Tashkent. The Uzbeks are likely to respond favorably to your interest in discussing counterterrorism, counterproliferation, and arms and drug trafficking-issues that they have cited as among their priority areas for cooperation with the United States.

Role in Afghanistan, Threat of Terrorism

2. (SBU) The Uzbeks have expressed keen interest in-and concern about-stability in Afghanistan. They have made no secret that they think democracy should be only a secondary priority and that the efforts of the international community have been less than perfect. That said, they are interested in helping. Uzbekistan is playing an increasingly important role in our efforts to stabilize Afghanistan by permitting the transit by rail and road of non-lethal and non-military equipment across its borders in support of Coalition forces. Uzbekistan recently simplified the clearance process for U.S. use of the German Termez air bridge by adding the United States to the list of International Security Assistance Force nations approved for its use and by waiving the earlier requirement to submit diplomatic notes for each case. Over the past two years, Uzbekistan has hosted two significant international conferences on Afghan security that have included experts from the region and beyond. The Uzbeks have finalized a deal with the Afghans for the transmission of electricity south and plan to increase deliveries in the future.

3. (SBU) The Uzbeks continue to push the "6+3" proposal for

Afghanistan, first mooted by President Karimov at the NATO/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Committee summit in Bucharest in April 2008. This proposal advises the creation of a "Contact Group" consisting of Afghanistan's neighbors, Russia, the United States, and NATO, and administered and coordinated by the United Nations. We have reservations about this construct, however, given that it envisions no role for the elected Government of Afghanistan in discussions.

14. (SBU) The threat of terrorism in Uzbekistan remains very real. We continue to receive information that indicates terrorist groups may be planning attacks in Uzbekistan. Supporters of terrorist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Al-Qaida, the Islamic Jihad Union, and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement are active in the region. Uzbekistan experienced a wave of terrorist violence in 2004-including suicide bombings against the U.S. Embassy, Uzbek police, and Uzbek private and commercial facilities-and other incidents have occurred since then. In May 2005, armed militants stormed a prison in Andijon, released its prisoners, and then took control of the regional administration and other government buildings in Andijon province. Fighting broke out between government forces and the militants in a crowded town square, and reports indicated that several hundred civilians died in the ensuing violence. In late May 2009, there were attacks on a border post in Khonobod and a suicide bombing at a police station in the city of Andijon. The Government of Uzbekistan prefers to avoid publicity of its support for Coalition operations in Afghanistan to mitigate the risk of additional terrorist attacks

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against the country.

Counternarcotics and Counterproliferation Cooperation

15. (SBU) The U.S. and Uzbekistan have been discussing the return of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to Uzbekistan for nearly two years. In mid-June, the Uzbeks granted accreditation to a DEA agent in a move that may foreshadow its reestablishment in the country as well as further counternarcotics cooperation and information-sharing. The Government of Uzbekistan is genuinely concerned about narcotics trafficking through its territory from Afghanistan via Tajikistan, and information about seizures now appears on an almost daily basis in the state-controlled press. The newly-accredited DEA Country Attache will seek to rebuild relationships we cultivated in previous years, which will require additional resources for program activities that focus on this key mutual interest.

16. (SBU) The U.S., through the State Department's Bureau of International and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), is a major donor to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which maintains its regional headquarters in Tashkent. Currently, there is an active project funded solely by the U.S. to enhance security at the strategic Termez River Port, a barge facility on the border with Afghanistan. UNODC will also launch a drug demand reduction project funded by the U.S. through INL. In the past year, INL has also provided opportunities to attend trainings and conferences abroad for Uzbek law enforcement officers.

17. (SBU) Uzbekistan also has cooperated with the United States in counterproliferation efforts. Last summer, Uzbekistan acceded to the U.S. and Russian-led Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. The State Department's Export Control and Related Border Security Program (EXBS) funds border security-related

equipment deliveries as well as training events and conferences for Uzbek law enforcement officers to strengthen Uzbekistan's ability to detect and interdict items of proliferation concern. The U.S. Department of Energy supports the maintenance of a network of 27 radiation portal monitors on Uzbekistan's borders that were installed by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency's (DTRA) Weapons of Mass Destruction-Proliferation Prevention Initiative. DTRA currently combats proliferation in Uzbekistan through the Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP), which has constructed eight out of 14 Regional Diagnostic Laboratories throughout the country and has trained over 1270 lab staff, epidemiologists, and clinicians. BTRP's goals include consolidating all Especially Dangerous Pathogens (EDPs) in Uzbekistan and establishing a comprehensive national surveillance network to detect and respond to potential EDP outbreaks.

Human Rights and Democratization

18. (SBU) Uzbekistan is still far from genuine democratic development or respect for human rights. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan made progress in some key areas last year, including releasing several political prisoners, allowing limited access by the Red Cross, registering two U.S.-based human rights NGOs, ratifying the UN Trafficking-in-Persons Convention, and adopting two key International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions. The government has continued to arrest and imprison suspected religious extremists. The GOU continues to restrict the media, NGOs, educational exchanges, and other elements that promote the flow of

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ideas and support for those defending human rights. The independent bar association was replaced with a government-controlled body that appears to be administering a subjective licensing exam that essentially vets attorneys for loyalty to the government. After a six-month breakthrough trial period with the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) in 2008, Uzbekistan has yet to come to a long-term agreement with ICRC that would provide the organization with unlimited access to prisons for monitoring purposes. We are also trying to negotiate an agreement with Uzbekistan on religious freedom pursuant to its inclusion on the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern.

19. (SBU) Government of Uzbekistan officials, including Parliamentary Speaker Tashkmukhamedova, have signaled their interest in inter-parliamentary exchanges with the United States and would probably welcome a proposal for such a political dialogue. Such a proposal also would be timely, given upcoming parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan this December. It would be helpful to remind Uzbek interlocutors that human rights issues get a lot of attention in Congress. In this vein, you could cite the case of imprisoned journalist Salidjahon Abdurakhmanov, who was sentenced to 10 years on what we believe were politically-motivated charges after he assisted a New York Times reporter during a visit to Uzbekistan. It would also be helpful if you could appeal for the release of Abdulaziz Dadahanov, a U.S. exchange program alumnus with a vocal network of friends in America seeking his immediate release after he was sentenced to 8-12 years in prison for membership in Nur, a moderate Islamic group based in Turkey and active in the region.

Trade and Energy

¶10. (SBU) Uzbekistan has fared better than some other countries in weathering the economic crisis, a fact Uzbek officials will point out with relish. Although the U.S. is geographically removed from Central Asia, trade with Uzbekistan has been steady or growing in recent years and more than doubled in 2008 as compared with 2007. U.S. exports to Uzbekistan in 2008 amounted to \$300.7 million, with Boeing aircraft sales, aircraft parts, and pharmaceuticals accounting for nearly \$215 million. U.S. imports amounted to \$292.2 million, with uranium accounting for \$285.1 million and other raw material imports providing another \$5 million. The first four months of 2009 show a downturn in U.S. imports from Uzbekistan, but the numbers for U.S. exports compare favorably with the numbers from 2007 despite the economic crisis. (For comparison, in 2007, Russian imports from Uzbekistan were over \$1 billion, and Russian exports were over \$1.1 billion).

¶11. (SBU) The energy sector has been the main generator of Uzbekistan's export earnings in 2009. The export of energy in the first quarter grew to \$1.3 billion from \$662 million in 2008 thanks to an export price that has nearly doubled since last year. The sustainability of these prices is uncertain, however. Russia, the main importer of natural gas from the region, is facing significant problems. Reports say that due to decreased European demand, Gazprom is trying to renegotiate prices and volumes with both Turkmen and Uzbek suppliers. Nevertheless, the share of hydrocarbons in Uzbekistan's exports increased from 16.8 percent to a whopping 52.5 percent in the first quarter of 2009. (Note: Uzbekistan is a net oil importer. End note.)
NORLAND